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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
22 March 1966

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ARMY review(s)
completed.

State Dept. review
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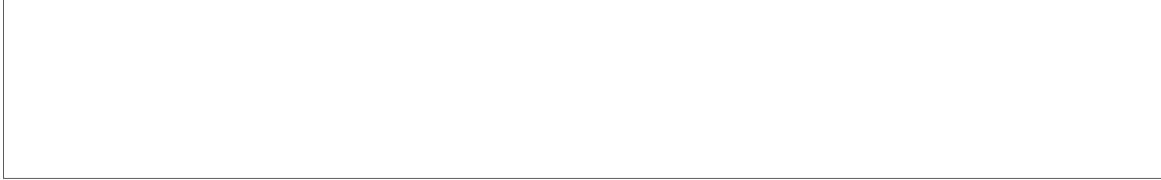
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HIGHLIGHTS

Antigovernment activity gained new militancy today as various "struggle groups" in Hue and Da Nang pre-empted the municipal radios to broadcast a pledge "to strive to the end to fulfill the people's aspirations."

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam: Heavy fighting apparently continues between battalion-strength USMC and Viet Cong forces in northeast Quang Ngai Province (Para. 1). USMC Operation OREGON continues according to plan northwest of Hue, in Thua Thien Province (Para. 2). Vietnamese CIDG paramilitary forces have inflicted heavy losses on the Viet Cong in two separate engagements in Darlac Province (Para. 4). USAF B-52s yesterday attacked a suspected major Viet Cong infiltration and supply base just inside Laos along South Vietnam's Kontum Province border (Para. 6). An estimated two Viet Cong platoons early today made a mortar attack against Cam Ly airfield near the mountain resort of Da Lat (Para. 7). Interrogation of a PAVN soldier recently apprehended in Darlac Province has revealed Communist intentions to attack Plei Me Special Forces camp in Pleiku Province and certain areas in adjacent Kontum Province during the forthcoming rainy season (Para. 9).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: Anti-Ky student groups pre-empt municipal radios in Hue and Da Nang; broadcasts call for an end to military regime in Saigon and specifically denounce Premier Ky and Chief of State Thieu (Paras. 1-3). No attempt as yet by military authorities in northern cities to repress government's critics (Para. 4). Continuing efforts by "struggle forces" in Saigon to organize student demonstrations (Para. 6). Ky faces dilemma in handling Buddhist unrest; denies criticising Buddhists in recent speech (Paras. 7-8). General Thi still in I Corps; possibility of anti-US slant developing in protest movement (Paras. 9-10). Meeting of Vietnamese provincial representatives in Saigon 23-25 March unlikely to have much attendance from northern provinces (Para. 11).



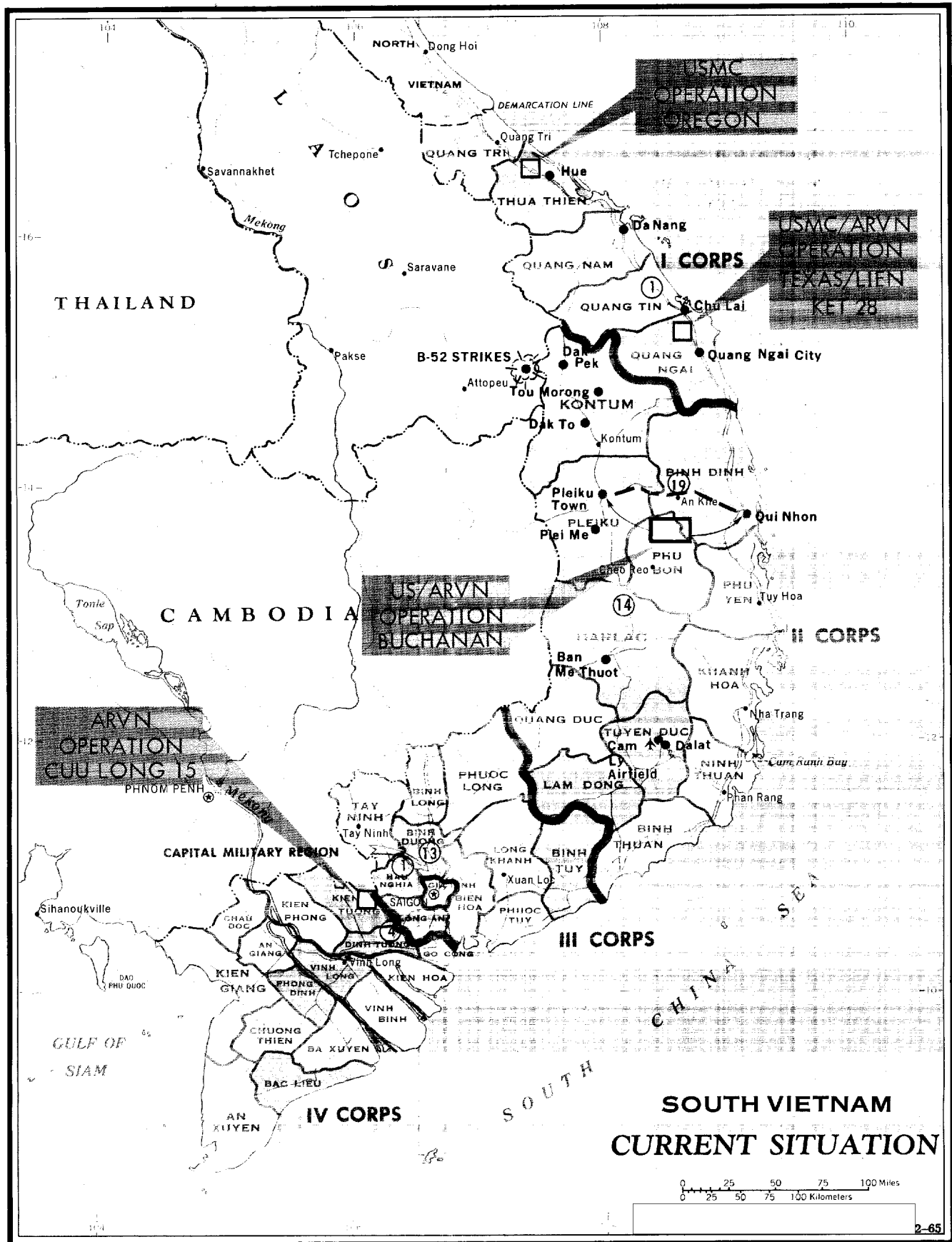
IV. Other Communist Military Developments:
There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: There
is nothing of significance to report.

VI. Other Major Aspects: Recent photography
has identified a new road linking the Laotian in-
filtration net with a newly constructed road segment
in Cambodia. The combined road segment is some 100
miles long (Paras. 1-2). Other evidence indicates
that there has been a substantial increase in illi-
cit traffic in rice from Cambodia to the Communists
in South Vietnam (Para. 3).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Battalion-strength USMC elements engaged an estimated Viet Cong battalion during 20-21 March in an area approximately 10 miles southeast of Chu Lai. The marines were part of the joint US/ARVN Operation TEXAS/LIEN KET 28 in northern coastal Quang Ngai Province. A second USMC battalion from Chu Lai was subsequently committed to the battle and all units were reported heavily engaged last night. Since its initiation on 19 March, the allied ground sweep has resulted in Viet Cong losses of 162 killed (US body count), one captured, and 13 suspects apprehended. Friendly casualties to date stand at 50 killed (45 US, including 11 US killed last night in a helicopter crash caused by enemy ground fire), 141 wounded (115 US), and two ARVN missing.

2. A second USMC battalion has reinforced the 1st Battalion/4th US Marines conducting search-and-destroy Operation OREGON northwest of Hue, in Thua Thien Province. The ground sweep, currently in its fourth day, has apparently encountered stiff enemy resistance, resulting in US casualties of 10 killed and 42 wounded and Communist losses of 48 killed.

3. Communist forces in Kien Tuong Province, west of Saigon near the Cambodian border, have offered heavy resistance thus far to Operation CUU LONG 15--a six-battalion ARVN search-and-destroy ground sweep initiated on 20 March. To date, government forces claim to have killed 229 Viet Cong, captured 16, detained 34 suspects, and seized 80 weapons. Friendly casualties currently total three killed (one US) and 38 wounded (four US).

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4. In two separate engagements in the central highlands province of Darlac on 19 and 20 March, respectively, company-size or larger Vietnamese CIDG paramilitary units on patrol reconnaissance missions skirmished with Communist forces possibly approximating battalion strength. The two actions resulted in enemy losses of 157 killed (ARVN body count) and seven captured. Government casualties were 11 killed and 11 wounded

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5. Multibattalion US/ARVN road-clearing task force elements have terminated Operation BUCHANAN, a route-security mission along strategic lateral Highway 19 between Qui Nhon and Pleiku, after eight days without significant enemy contact.

6. Fifteen USAF B-52 Stratofortresses yesterday attacked a suspected major Viet Cong infiltration and supply base approximately 26 miles northwest of the capital of Kontum Province and two miles inside Laos. Ground follow-up operations were not scheduled.

Viet Cong Activity

7. An estimated two-platoon Viet Cong force early today shelled Cam Ly Airfield, near the mountain resort of Da Lat in Tuyen Duc Province, with 15 rounds of 60-mm. mortar fire. One light observation aircraft was destroyed and one H-37 Mojave helicopter damaged; in addition, one ARVN soldier was killed and five wounded. Enemy losses totaled two killed and two weapons captured.

8. On the basis of more complete information, MACV now reports that the 20 March attack by two Viet Cong companies on an ARVN battalion in Binh Tuy Province, 70 miles northeast of Saigon, resulted in enemy losses of 166 killed (ARVN body

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count) and seven captured, in contrast to ARVN casualties of 12 killed, 28 wounded, and two missing.

25X1 9. Subsequent interrogation of a Viet Cong captive

has revealed Communist intentions to conduct large-scale attacks against Plei Me Special Forces camp in Pleiku Province and against certain unspecified areas in Kontum Province during the forthcoming rainy season. Plans for an attack on Plei Me have also been obtained from other sources. However, this is the first report that Communist forces also plan attacks in Kontum Province. The most likely targets are probably Dak Pek, Dak To, and Tou Morong.

10. A review by MACV of the Viet Cong - initiated incidents during February 1966 has revealed the following patterns:

(A) ATTACKS: Viet Cong attacks were generally concentrated along major lines of communications, and in heavily populated areas with the heaviest concentrations along Route 1 between Da Nang and Quang Ngai city; along Route 14 in Darlac Province, north of Ban Me Thuot; along Route 13 in Binh Duong Province; along Route 1 in Hau Nghia Province; and along Route 4 in Long An, Dinh Tuong, Vinh Long, and Phong Dinh provinces. The pattern of attacks indicates that the maximum enemy effort was aimed not at gaining territory, but rather at gaining control of the population and isolating the major urban centers from the rest of the country.

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(B) SABOTAGE: Viet Cong sabotage was concentrated in four major areas. In southern Quang Ngai and northern Binh Dinh provinces, the Viet Cong continued their interdiction effort against Route 1, thus prolonging the six-month-long isolation of this area from the respective province capitals. Route 4 was heavily sabotaged in the delta provinces of Dinh Tuong and Bac Lieu, but government efforts to keep both stretches of the road open were almost 100 percent successful. The heaviest railroad interdiction occurred in Thua Thien Province, particularly the stretch between Da Nang and Hue which was closed for more than half of February.

(C) TERRORISM: Viet Cong terrorism was heavy in many widespread sections of the country, but by far the greatest concentration was in the Capital Military Region around Saigon and in the central area of the delta, both highly valuable areas and both hotly contested by the Viet Cong and GVN.

(D) PROPAGANDA: Viet Cong propaganda/subversion activities were heaviest in Darlac Province and in the Lam Dong/Binh Tuy Province border area. Of particular interest is the location of propaganda incidents in areas where attacks and sabotage are generally low or nonexistent, suggesting that the Viet Cong may be using this "weapon" in an effort to influence areas where they do not have large enough forces to physically control the area.

11. On balance, the pattern of Viet Cong activity during February closely paralleled that of recent months. A major exception was the introduction of new units into Darlac Province. The pattern for future months will probably reflect no drastic changes in emphasis, although, as the southwest monsoons approach, enemy activity can be expected to decrease along the coastal plain of I and II Corps and increase in the central highlands and in III and IV Corps.

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II. THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Antigovernment activity gained new militancy today as various "struggle groups" in Hue and Da Nang pre-empted the municipal radios to broadcast a pledge "to strive to the end to fulfill the people's aspirations."

2. University students in Hue seized the radio station this morning, justifying their action by the argument that "moderation is no longer effective." For several hours, until reception deteriorated, there were repeated broadcasts attacking the legality of the present regime in Saigon, denouncing Chief of State Thieu, Premier Ky, and Deputy Premier Co, and calling for implementation of the four-point program of the Buddhist hierarchy.

3. In Da Nang, a regular radio announcer broadcast a communique in the name of the "Popular Force Struggling for Revolution"--identified as the new appellation of the previous "civil and military struggle group"--indicating that it was formally organizing itself to speak for the local populace and military. The statement said that the "Popular Force" was "taking the Vietnamese Information Service as its headquarters, and the radio station, until the struggle is successful."

4. In neither Hue nor Da Nang was there any evidence of interference in these moves by local authorities. According to information of the US Embassy in Saigon, the new I Corps commander General Chuan has indicated that the Hue radio will be available to local students to broadcast any statements they may choose.

5. There are other indications that antigovernment groups are gearing up for a major campaign against the Saigon government. The chief of Quang Ngai Province reportedly stated yesterday that the people in central Vietnam would not accept the military's "high-handed manner of dismissing General Thi," and that agitation would continue until the present government is brought down.

struggle committees are being organized in Quang Tin Province in preparation for an all-out effort.

persons with suspected Viet Cong ties among the organizers.

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6. In Saigon, there are continuing reports of efforts by a "struggle force," including at least some Buddhist monks, to organize student demonstrations. Buddhist Institute chairman Tam Chau reportedly personally dispersed an attempted demonstration today by pupils of one Buddhist-run school.

7. Signs now point to an increase in the tempo of antigovernment protests, particularly in I Corps where various local leaders and students appear determined to keep up pressure. This could put Premier Ky in Saigon in an increasing dilemma as to whether to permit some continuing agitation in the hope that the "struggle groups" will lose steam or to order stern measures to put an end to protest activity. Should he adopt the latter course, he risks some danger that authorities in I Corps may defy such orders or that repressive measures may further inflame emotions and play into opposition hands.

8. Ky, meanwhile, in an effort to prevent a hardening Buddhist attitude, has issued a public denial that his statements at Da Lat this weekend were aimed at the Buddhist leadership or that he considers Buddhist wishes "illogical and unpatriotic." Ky also praised Buddhist Institute chairman Tam Chau as a respected national leader and anti-Communist, an indication of his apparent hope that Chau can be kept on a course of moderation even if Tri Quang attempts to organize an all-out opposition movement in I Corps.

9. Meanwhile, there has been no indication that General Thi has responded to orders reportedly sent to him yesterday to return to Saigon at once because of the return of Tri Quang to I Corps. Thi had earlier told a group of reporters that the situation in central Vietnam would worsen if he left.

10. There was no reference in support of Thi personally in today's antigovernment radio broadcasts in either Hue or Da Nang, nor were there any anti-American overtones. Buddhist leaders have previously warned, however, that too strong American

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[REDACTED]

identification with the Ky government could lead to attacks on the US, and Tam Chau's speech in Saigon on 19 February contained an ambiguous reference to the gradual loss of Vietnamese sovereignty. The embassy has also noted a Saigon student newspaper recently attacked Ky as an "American stooge" for permitting himself to be used by the US at Honolulu and for bowing to alleged US support for the dissident tribal movement FULRO in II Corps. The embassy has found this attack disturbing because of the student paper's links to II Corps commander General Loc, so far quiet in the present confrontation.

11. The Saigon regime is holding a meeting of provincial representatives in the capital from 23 to 25 March to discuss pacification programs. [REDACTED]

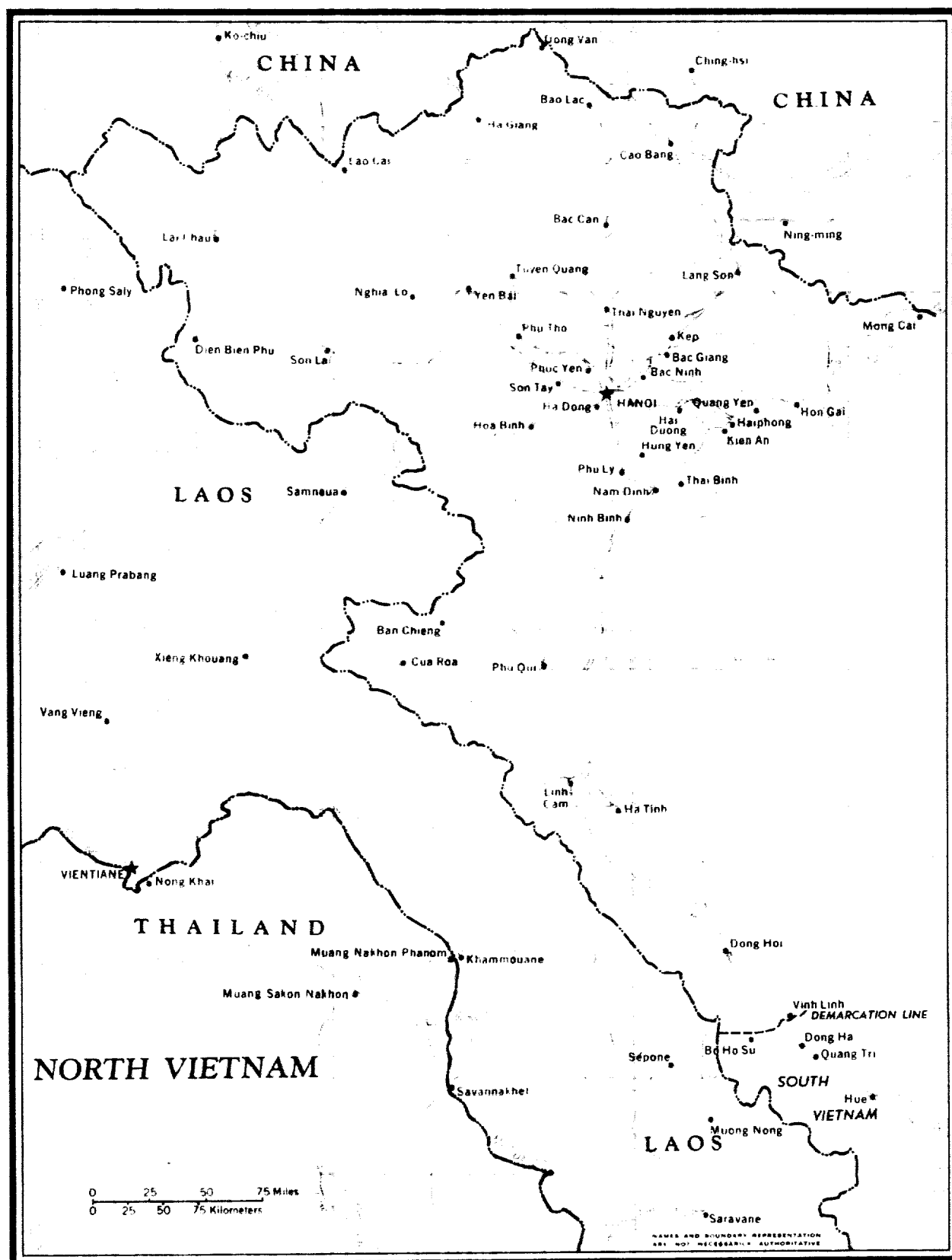
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25X1 [REDACTED] few representatives of the provinces in the corps are likely to attend. If, as occurred during a similar meeting last October, the session becomes a private forum for criticism of the government's proposed advisory council, it could also lend weight to the present Buddhist line.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

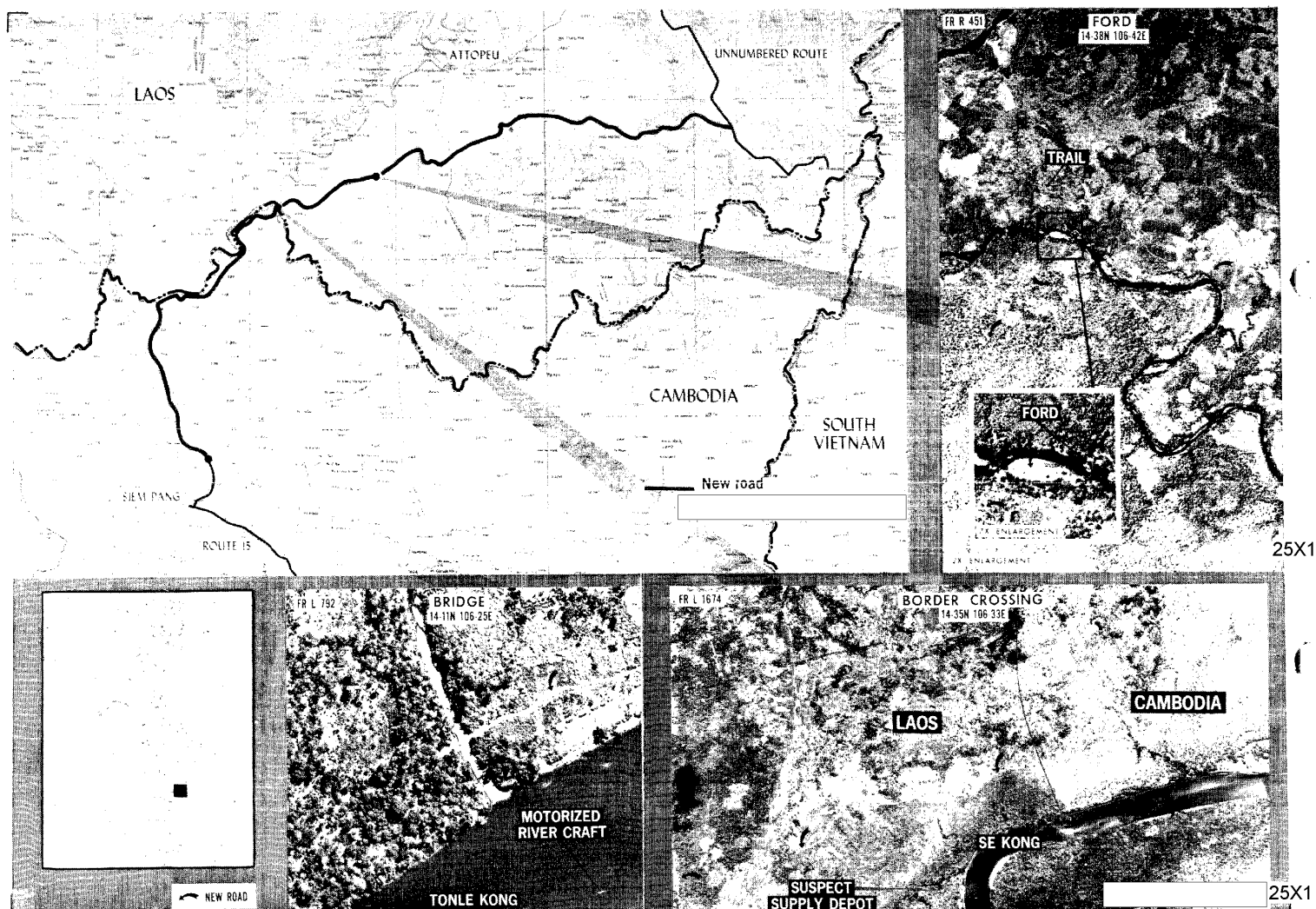
1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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NEWLY CONSTRUCTED ROAD LAOS - CAMBODIA BORDER AREA



VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

1. Recent photography has identified a new road linking the Laotian infiltration net with a newly constructed road segment in Cambodia. The combined road stretches some 100 miles from the southern extension of Route 96 in Laos to Siem Pang and Route 15 in Cambodia. The road parallels the Se Kong River and presumably will be used to supplement or replace the river as a channel for moving supplies.

2. Other recent photography showing motorized craft and suspected storage areas along the Se Kong in Laos and Cambodia, appears to substantiate information provided by a [] defector. He claimed that in September 1965 the Communists constructed two small storage areas along the Se Kong in Laos, and a somewhat larger one on the Cambodian side of the border. He said that these depots were used to store rice, dry fish, and clothing which were smuggled north on the Se Kong from Siem Pang. The supplies were then relayed in Laos by bicycle teams along a newly constructed trail which joined the Laotian road net southeast of Attapeu. The Communists apparently upgraded this trail into the motorable road which has been recently identified in photography.

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3. Other evidence indicating that there has been a substantial increase in illicit rice trade between Cambodia and the Communists []

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[] Cambodia is facing a shortage of rice for export this year. Although some of the shortage can be attributed to a below normal rice harvest, it appears quite likely that Cambodian peasants are selling their rice to Chinese smugglers for prices higher than that being offered by the Cambodian Government. Sihanouk has alluded to this problem in public statements and Cambodian border forces have been instructed to stop the movement of rice into South Vietnam.

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[redacted]

reported seeing some 40-50 trucks moving east on Route 19 to a point a few miles from the South Vietnam border. The trucks, which were owned by local Chinese businessmen, carried bags of rice. Farther west, [redacted] saw a small number of Cambodian military trucks moving north from Bo Kheo on Route 19 to a village on the Se San River, an area in which little Cambodian military activity has been noted heretofore.

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[redacted] these sightings may represent a Cambodian military buildup including the establishment of rice stocks or possibly preparations for an April visit to the area by Prince Sihanouk. [redacted]

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[redacted] did not exclude the possibility that the Chinese-owned trucks were smuggling rice to the Viet Cong.

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